

Department of Developmental Services
Council on Developmental Services

March 2, 2015

In attendance by phone: Patti Silva, Chair, Jamie Lazaroff, Adrienne Benjamin, David Hadden, Rick Lenz, Diana Mennone, Sheila Mulvey, Deborah Ullman, Patrick Vingo, Lisa Weisinger-Roland

In attendance at Central Office: Jack Frost

Absent: Dr. Neal Stein

Staff: Jordan Scheff, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Rod O'Connor, Legislative and Government Affairs, Maureen Prewitt, Executive Secretary

Meeting opened at 11:05

Opportunity for Public Participation

No public comment.

Council Discussion on Budget

Patti Silva stated that the Appropriations Committee Public Hearings on the Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget will be held on Friday, March 6. This Special Meeting was called to give Council members a chance to discuss the Budget and ask Deputy Commissioner Jordan Scheff any questions they may have on the Budget.

While Council members are encouraged to submit their personal testimony, the Council wanted to present testimony as a group.

The Council sent a letter to the Governor on January 30, 2015. The letter was also sent to be published in the Letters to the Editor, however, the Hartford Courant refused to print the letter until they spoke to Commissioner Murray.

Deputy Commissioner stated that DDS will be sending out the Budget in the next day or so. DDS is still reviewing the Budget to understand it and what the numbers mean.

Council members heard that there is no new money for grads in this budget cycle. Deputy Commissioner explained that those age outs funded through the Voluntary Service Program (VSP), which are funded by either the LEA or DCF, will have funding. Unfortunately, traditional grads will not have funding for the next two years. It may mean that we will be looking at any money left to meet the needs of these individual's, however, there is no new money in the system. Need to meet as many individuals as we can with existing money. The Governor and Ben Barnes have presented the budget, and it's now in the hands of the legislature how they want to handle it.

Patti Silva explained that in the past when case management services were removed, these have not yet been returned. Families are very concerned that the same situation may happen with day services.

Council members asked the difference between age outs and grads. Age outs are individuals receiving services directly through DDS or funded through other sources. There are approximately 100 individuals aging out where money is available. Jack Frost indicated that age outs tend to live outside of the home and grads live at home. There are approximately 300 grads coming up.

The two areas of concern regarding the budget are funding for the Voluntary Services Program (VSP) and the day account. Adjustments have been made to other accounts, but the department will try to manage those accounts.

Council members asked for a description of what VSP was. Deputy Commissioner explained that this program supports children with behavioral health needs where there is DCF involvement. The family must allow a behaviorist to work in

their home. It is hoped that working with families early on the family can be stabilized allowing them to stay together longer. The current caseload is approximately 550 children, including approximately 30 children with autism. The budget reduction in this program FY 15-17 is \$13,829,318. VSP was the single biggest line item cut

It is important when Council members are writing testimony, to focus your concerns on VSP, day and residential funding items that may be cut as this is what Appropriations responds to, as well as getting the point across on how the cuts are impacting DDS families. Telling personal stories go a long way. The emotional factor is always the best testimony and far more important than the numbers.

Arc discussions are very focused on closing regional centers, STS and state group homes. It should be acknowledged that the system has been underfunded for about 20 years. Waiting list and day program funding continually misses funding during both good and bad funding years.

Council members expressed their concern that everyone's testimony reflect the need for sensitivity and not pit families against families. This is especially true as funding decreases and families are vying for the same money. Is this topic appropriate to address? Rod O'Connor indicated that it could be included in testimony but there is a bill being drafted that addresses the I/DD caucus with recommendations for closing STS and regional centers. This might be where the Council could include the issue of pitting of families against one another. Rod will send information to Council members as soon as the bill comes out.

Patti Silva solicited Council members to see who would be interested in forming a subcommittee to prepare a draft letter, which will be sent to all Council members for their review and comment. Adrienne Benjamin made a Motion to form a subcommittee and Council members unanimously agreed. Online drafting will be done by Pattie Silva Deb, Deborah Ullman, Adrienne Benjamin, Jack Frost, and Lisa Weisinger-Roland.

Public testimony begins at 4:30 P.M. Rod explained that if you choose to sign up and are bringing a loved one, there is a special sign up list for people with disabilities, everyone else is chosen by lottery. The two lists are then combined. Electronic testimony to the Appropriations Committee is also another option. Rod will send Council members information on this. Remember that submitted testimony can be posted on the website, therefore, personal information should be carefully reviewed to maintain HIPAA privacy to both the individual and their family.

Questions can be sent to Jordan through email at Jordan.Scheff@ct.gov .

Meeting adjourned at 12:19 P.M.